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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 003232

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SUBJECT: NEW PROPAGANDA BLITZ ON MODEL TEACHER AIMED AT
PARTY'S CRISIS OF BELIEF, BOOSTING HU'S AUTHORITY
(C-AL7-00773)

REF: A. STATE 55842

[1](#)B. BEIJING 2188

Classified By: Political Section Internal Unit Chief Susan A. Thornton.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) According to Embassy contacts, a major propaganda campaign launched in April to celebrate the character and achievements of a PLA Navy political theory professor is the Party's latest effort to narrow the ideological chasm between official Party doctrines and the personal beliefs of cadres compelled to teach the doctrines. The campaign is likely also a reflection of Party chief Hu Jintao's ongoing efforts to elevate his ideological authority in advance of the 17th Party Congress scheduled for this fall. Although the campaign may be aimed in part at the low quality and irrelevance of political education in China's modernizing military, it's target audience is "ideology workers" in the Party at large. End Summary.

Media Blitz Heralds Advent of New Theory Paragon

[1](#)2. (C) The hero of the Party's most recent propaganda campaign is a professor of political theory at the Dalian Naval Academy, Fang Yonggang, who is dying of cancer but insists on staying in the classroom to enlighten naval cadets on "the Party's innovative theories." His devotion to preaching the political word, his dedication to his students and his personal sacrifice in continuing to disseminate the Party's doctrines are being touted as worthy of all ideological and theoretical workers' emulation. The campaign kicked off in early April when mainstream party media began publicizing Fang's achievements and heralded Hu Jintao's visit to Fang's hospital bed two months earlier as a testament to Fang's theoretical savvy, professionalism, personal dedication and courage. Politburo Standing Committee member and ideology czar, Li Changchun, soon followed with a call to all "theory workers" to read Hu Jintao's "instructions" on the campaign and to follow Fang's example.

[1](#)3. (C) On April 2, official media launched a full scale propaganda blitz promoting Fang's image. CCTV's evening news on April 6 carried video clips of Hu's visit while a color photo of the event was showcased on the front page of the Party's official mouthpiece, People's Daily. The Party news agency Xinhua reported that Fang had come to Hu's attention in January from a Central Military Commission (CMC) report and that Hu had immediately instructed propaganda organs to crank up their media machinery to spread the word. Reports and serialized specials, such as "The Vanguard of the Era,"

were launched on the CCTV evening news, talk shows and military channels and have continued apace; CCTV has established a special page on its website for Fang material; the official CMC paper PLA Daily has run a series of authoritative "commentator articles" along with numerous reports and articles; People's Daily, China Youth Daily, Enlightenment Daily and other core Party papers have carried daily features; and an "All-Army Political and Ideological Education Forum" convened on April 6 to study Fang's deeds received heavy coverage in both print and electronic media.

Boost to Hu's Authority or Crisis of Belief?

14. (C) Central Party School (CPS) scholar Li Xiaoke (protect) told Poloffs that the media campaign is essentially the latest effort by Central authorities to address the "crisis of belief" among Party members. Propaganda authorities, Li said, are particularly concerned about the lack of ideological enthusiasm among cadres, academics and others involved in political education. Li said his wife, a college professor who is required to lead ideology sessions as part of her responsibility, is a good example of the problem. Contemptuous of the propaganda she is required to teach, she uses the ideology sessions to introduce material to her students that she considers more beneficial. For example, to overcome young people's ignorance of the Cultural Revolution, she recently showed the banned Zhang Yimou film, "To Live," which chronicles the extreme suffering of people during that period. According to Li, the Propaganda Department's choice of a professor of political theory as the new model Party member is simply the latest effort to convince those who teach ideology to continue promoting the slogans and to inspire new confidence in Party doctrines among the Party faithful.

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15. (C) CPS Institute of International Strategic Studies Vice Dean Kang Shaobang (protect) separately told poloffs that he had attended a Fang Yonggang study session at CPS and would be responsible for transmitting the essence of the teaching to his own students the following week. Asked what it was all about, Kang replied that he "didn't understand a word." He went on to report that the Central Party School was recently censured for allowing the publication of an article in its journal "Scientific Socialism" that criticized the practice of amending the Party Charter to include each core leader's theoretical innovations, as was done with the inclusion of Jiang Zemin's Three Represents. Kang stated that the article, written by a reformist Party School professor, was circulated on the internet and caught the attention of the "highest levels of the leadership" who were not pleased. Kang and Li both separately assessed that Hu Jintao would be looking to have his own theoretical innovations included in the Party lexicon at some point and that criticism of the practice was viewed as "unhelpful."

16. (C) In the view of Legal Daily journalist and election activist Xiong Wei (protect), the Fang Yonggang campaign is closely related to Hu's ongoing efforts to elevate his ideological teachings in advance of the Party Congress. The importance of the campaign for Hu's ideological authority appears to be corroborated by its core themes, which celebrate the Party's "innovative theories"-- codewords for Hu's claims to have taken Marxist theory to the next level -- and make unusually strong claims for Hu's contribution to the Party's doctrinal canon.

17. (C) An authoritative article in the PLA Daily on April 3 cited Hu's goal of a "socialist harmonious society" as an example of innovative theory and praised the "tremendous power" of Hu's "scientific development concept," asserting that it could "reconstruct society and the natural world." Another piece on April 10 placed the "scientific development concept" on a par with the theories of Hu's predecessors Deng

Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, claiming that it explains "the essence of things" and reveals "the inherent laws of development for human society."

Chinks in the PLA's Ideological Armor?

18. (C) The campaign may have been prompted in part by a blistering critique of military propaganda work that appeared in the daily newspaper of the PLA Navy Political Department, People's Navy, last November. The article acknowledged that both officers and troops were scoffing at the irrelevance of political education and the poor quality of "theory workers" and called for a complete overhaul of Navy propaganda work. However, the core themes of the campaign and the broad range of media that are carrying it, indicate that it is aimed at the Party's propaganda cadres more generally. Xinhua quoted Li Changchun as noting Hu's "great concern" about the Party's "ideological work" and calling for building "a strong contingent of Marxist theoretical researchers and teachers" across the board, not just in the military. Li instructed "the broad masses of theoretical workers" to heed Hu's call to "make greater contributions to studying and disseminating the Party's innovative theories" by emulating Fang.

Comment

19. (C) Although the propaganda machinery has given the Fang Yonggang story top billing, most Chinese are only dimly aware of the story and view it as irrelevant. Even the intended audience of theoretical and educational workers, who do understand the subtext, do not appear to take the campaign seriously. The importance of the campaign, rather, lies in what it signals about the development of support for Hu's ideological authority at the top of the Party. As noted ref B, this remains a work in progress.

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